

I am writing about Connecticut's Right to Read legislation. I've dedicated my 18 year career as a teacher in Westport, CT. I have committed to growing as a teacher, specifically in the area of reading. I am currently a literacy coach and spend my days working with teachers to constantly outgrow ourselves in the service of children. I am also the parent of elementary age three children who attend Stratford Public Schools

Over the last few week, I have worked with our literacy team to analyze the reading programs mandated by the state of Connecticut as part of their Right to Read Legislation. I went into the process open-minded, looking for what our current approach was missing. What could we add? On the other side of the process, I am now left questioning what students and schools stand to lose if these programs are adopted.

When analyzing the seven programs the state has mandated, what stood out wasn't the approach to teaching reading. All the pieces were there- phonological awareness, phonics, and plenty of comprehension questions....complete with the answers spelled out for teachers....in case they couldn't figure them out. What stood out the most was that many of the programs were content-based, meaning each unit or module had a theme. Many of the programs had units that were completely designed around science themes-plants, birds, and ecosystems. *Interesting*, I thought aloud. *Is this to maximize time? Integrate content?* A little further exploration found that fiction units were largely based on stories about animals.

Then I started seeing Tweets and information coming out of Florida about what is currently happening in schools there. I couldn't help but wonder, are these mandated programs that are being pushed down by our state, and many others, also trying to control what students are exposed to? Is this bigger than how we teach kids to read? If teachers just follow the script and just read the books provided by "the program," will we succeed in erasing humanity from our schools?

Our fourth-grade team in Westport is about to teach a reading unit called Power and Perspective. In this unit, students are taught to think about who is telling the story and whose perspective might be missing. They also work to think about who has the power. I'm currently thinking about these questions as they relate to the mandates by the state and the programs being forced upon school districts.

There is no one program that will guarantee children will learn to read. Rather, it is the professional development, coaching, and systems that we put in place that will poise teachers to center the children in front of them. As our coach team worked our way through the mandated programs, I kept imagining my own children using them. I came to the conclusion that they would be fine. They would learn to read. But what is keeping me up at night is bigger than them learning to read. It is an issue of humanity. I love this quote from James Howe, "The world we are living in now makes the world of the book all that much more important as we consider what we want to say to our children about how to live, about what being human in a community should look like." This is precisely what I fear we stand to lose.

I am writing to ask you to help to suspend this legislation. I do not believe that due diligence has been done to vet the work put forward by the state and I worry about the lasting ramifications that it will have on our children, schools, and our state.

Sincerely,

Jessica Carey

